UNITED
NATIONS

CRC

Convention on the
Rights of the Child

Distr.
GENERAL

CRC/C/SR.688
24 January 2001

Original: ENGLISH

COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Twenty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 688th MEETING

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva,
on Friday, 19 January 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. OUEDRAOGO

later: Ms. MOKHUANE
(Vice-Chairperson)

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GE.01-40242 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS OF STATES PARTIES (agenda item 4) (continued)

Initial report of Saudi Arabia (continued) (CRC/C/61/Add.2; CRC/C/Q/SAR/1; written replies of the Government of Saudi Arabia to the questions in the lists of issues (document without a symbol distributed in the meeting room in English only))

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Saudi Arabia resumed places at the Committee table.

2. Mr. AL-NASSER (Saudi Arabia) said that women's rights in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were safeguarded in the light of the shariah and its sources (the Koran, the Sunna or tradition based on the Prophet's words and acts, and fiqh or interpretation of the law by religious scholars). Although there was no religious text prohibiting a woman from driving a car, the scholars had established general principles designed to protect the stability of society and to preserve its norms and traditions. It was unwise to discard those norms for purely personal motives. When the majority were in favour of a change in existing traditions, the rules would be amended to reflect that change.

3. Persons found guilty of using narcotics were treated as juveniles up to the age of 20 years primarily in order to allow such offenders to benefit from counselling services and, for example, to continue their studies instead of serving a prison sentence.

4. Mr. AL-HARBI (Saudi Arabia) said that benevolent associations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) provided four kinds of support: financial assistance, assistance in kind, technical assistance and emergency assistance. Pursuant to article 13 of the Associations Act, every benevolent association was allotted up to 1,500 square metres of land by the King. Welfare organizations were also authorized to accept charitable donations, voluntary contributions and grants.

5. Mr. AL-DHUBAIBAN (Saudi Arabia) said that article 45 of the Education Act stipulated that children were to be taught both oral and written communication skills. The art of expression, in both Arabic and English, was taught through classroom and extracurricular activities. Both male and female students were encouraged by the Ministry of Education to evaluate the curriculum and to express their views on teachers and the school administration. The views expressed, for example through questionnaires, were respected by the authorities.

6. Children of foreigners employed in Saudi Arabia had access either to State-run or private schools, including foreign-language schools, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Teachers of all nationalities were employed in the establishments concerned.

7. Article 54 of the Education Act recognized the need to take individual differences in aptitude into account in the education system. Students were encouraged to pursue their own interests. Under the supervision of the Council on Education and in consultation with the parents, both male and female students were directed towards subjects corresponding to their talents and propensities.

8. Ms. EL GUINDI inquired about the status of children in families where the parents were divorced. She understood that in cases where the husband's financial situation was unstable, the wife's family could look after the children. But where the wife had no remaining family members and the divorce had resulted from a unilateral decision by the husband, the law provided for the payment of alimony for only one year. What happened to her then, especially if she had custody of the children and the husband refused to continue paying maintenance?

9. She asked whether girls were allowed to engage in social and cultural activities and sports in school. Could girls who married and became pregnant continue their studies or were they prohibited from doing so by law?

10. According to one of the tables showing the number of children with disabilities in the Government's written answers to the list of issues, there had been nearly three times as many disabled male children in Saudi Arabia in 1999 as disabled female children. She found the figures puzzling, especially as Saudi Arabian society tended to focus on the interests of the male child. She wondered whether the delegation could account for the discrepancy.

11. Mr. DOEK, referring to the same tables, noted that there was also a significant difference between the figures for male and female disabled children attending regular schools. In 1999, more than 8,000 males had been enrolled in such schools, compared with just over 1,000 females. He asked whether a greater effort was made to enrol boys in regular schools.

12. The report underscored the central role of the family in society, an approach that corresponded fully to the philosophy underlying the Convention. Paragraph 153 referred to cases in which children were deprived of their family environment owing to the death of their parents and other factors. In the case of unfit parents, the courts decided whether the child should be withdrawn from their care. He wished to know who advised the judge on whether the child should be sent to a welfare institution or placed in the care of a family (kafalah) or a guardian, who could be a relative or some other trustworthy person. Was there a child protection service that carried out an investigation and were the children themselves consulted? If they objected to the proposed placement, were their views taken into account? He would also be interested to learn whether efforts were made to rehabilitate parents who had been deemed unfit so that their children could be returned to them.

13. Reference was made in the written replies to a study on improvement of the effectiveness of the procedures to protect children from physical abuse. He asked what kinds of shortcomings the study sought to redress and whether they concerned abuse in the family, in institutions or in both.

14. The tables on vocational education in the written replies contained figures for males only. Were there no females in industrial or commercial colleges?

15. He commended the philosophy underlying the administration of juvenile justice set forth in paragraph 55 of the report. But he would welcome more detailed practical information on procedures, such as whether juveniles were held in pre-trial detention and, if so, for how long, who took the decision to remand a juvenile in custody, whether juvenile suspects had access to a

lawyer on arrest and whether the parents were present during police questioning and at the trial. Could the prosecutor propose community service for juveniles as an alternative to imprisonment and, if so, how was such service organized and supervised? He wondered what purpose a sentence to flogging or similar forms of corporal punishment was supposed to serve, since it was generally acknowledged that violence bred violence. Research indicated that youngsters who were subjected to violence were more likely to resort to violence themselves.

16. Mr. MOHKUANE noted that, according to the Kingdom's education policy, education for girls was designed to enable them to live a full life as a successful housewife, an exemplary wife and a good mother and to prepare them for work compatible with their disposition as women, such as teaching, nursing and the medical profession. Such a policy was, in her view, incompatible with the provision of article 29 of the Convention requiring that education should be directed towards the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. If girls were confined to certain professions, how could those who were gifted in disciplines such as engineering or law develop their potential?

17. The Committee had received information to the effect that curricula in Saudi Arabia were outmoded, based on rote learning, and failed to teach problem-solving skills and critical analysis. Young people were reportedly unhappy with a curriculum that failed to equip them for a world characterized by globalization. Had their views been taken into account in policy-making?

18. The law on inheritance was based on the shariah but she wondered whether there was some provision for flexibility where a man violated the shariah by failing to provide for his family.

19. According to the report, breastfeeding was recommended for up to four months, but six months was the period recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). She asked whether women in urban areas generally tended to breastfeed for a shorter period. Was it true that working mothers were not given time to breastfeed and that there were no facilities for the purpose?

20. Mr. RABAH, noting that article 166 of the Labour Code prohibited night work for juveniles under the age of 16, asked what kind of work was permissible during the day. Were there any statistics on the nationality and family status of working children and on the factors that prompted them to seek employment? Was there disparity between the wages paid to juveniles and adults? He asked whether Saudi Arabia had ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) and whether there was an authority responsible for ensuring compliance with the Labour Code.

21. According to paragraph 97 of the report, no citizen could be deprived of Saudi nationality except for a valid reason. He wished to know who decided whether a valid reason existed and what ill effects a child might suffer if his or her nationality was revoked.

22. Paragraphs 134 and 135 of the report stated that a pregnant prisoner received special treatment until 40 days after delivery and remained in hospital until released by the physician. He asked whether, on returning to the prison, she was allowed to keep her child.

23. According to paragraph 141, juvenile offenders were sometimes released and pardoned for good conduct or for having memorized the Koran. He wished to know what criteria the judge took into account in making such decisions and what proportion of a sentence had to be served prior to judicial review. He would also be interested to hear more about the relationship between the police and juvenile offenders. Were there, for example, special police officers who attended to their needs during detention and, in particular, immediately prior to release?

24. Paragraph 155 stated that judges could assign children who were separated from their parents to relatives or place them in a welfare institution until a trustworthy guardian was found or until the child reached the age of 20. He asked whether those provisions were applicable to boys and girls without distinction.

25. According to paragraph 168, the State protected children during travel and the custody of expatriate children was regulated in accordance with the shariah. He wished to know whether the Kingdom had ratified the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption and whether there were any bilateral treaties that would protect children from being forced to travel against their will, where for example, there was a dispute between parents regarding the custody of the child.

26. He noted the increasing number of children involved in car accidents, and asked whether any measures had been taken to prevent such accidents.

27. Ms. TIGERSTEDT-TÄHTELÄ said that the Committee was very concerned about the issue of discrimination towards women and girls in Saudi Arabia. The goal of protecting girls and educating them to be mothers had been cited as an explanation. However, the Convention stated that there should be no discrimination and the State party should take the necessary measures.

28. She understood that shariah was applied in very different ways according to country and that, in Saudi Arabia, tradition was also widely applied and was separate from shariah. It would be interesting to know whether tradition had influenced the application of shariah or vice versa and whether, if it was not possible to influence shariah, it would be possible to influence tradition. Discrimination against women had existed in most countries in the world but their situation was improving; was Saudi Arabia taking action to lessen discrimination against women and girls?

29. Ms. RILANTONO said that, according to paragraph 81 of the report, abortion was prohibited. As early pregnancies were increasing, she asked what measures of control had been established, whether family planning was used in Saudi Arabia and, if so, what methods were employed.

30. It would be useful to know whether the Government encouraged breastfeeding and followed WHO regulations that feeding with formula should not be promoted. Also, how many weeks of maternity leave were granted to working mothers and were day-care facilities provided once they returned to work?

31. Saudi Arabian children appeared to be very fortunate with regard to education, which was free through to high school and even at the university level. However, the Committee would welcome additional information on how students were selected to enter university, whether there were gender-based differences in treatment and whether girls preferred to study the arts or the sciences.

32. According to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, children with disabilities were specific targets for recruitment as beggars and, in 1997, a large number of children who had been brought into Saudi Arabia as beggars had been deported back to India. The Committee would appreciate additional information on that issue, including statistics and any preventive programmes.

33. Ms. SARDENBERG said that, according to the written replies, new legislation had been enacted, particularly in the areas of health and education, and it appeared that the implementation of the Convention in Saudi Arabia was focused on those two areas. She recommended that the country should consider implementing the Convention in a more global and comprehensive manner.

34. The report had placed greater emphasis on children than on the adults who worked with them, and it would be useful to know whether those working with children received special training.

35. The delegation had mentioned that Saudi Arabia had been present at the 1990 World Summit for Children and would attend the follow-up event in 2001; in that respect, it would be useful to learn whether Saudi Arabia had drafted a national plan of action in accordance with the recommendations of the 1990 meeting and, if so, whether there had been an evaluation of the achievement of targets and goals.

36. Regarding discrimination against girls, Saudi Arabian youth must be well informed about events in the world. She wondered whether young women felt frustrated in their aspirations and whether any mechanisms had been established to address that situation, for example, to enable them to discuss with specialized personnel the ways in which the closed society in Saudi Arabia affected them.

37. There were reports of police brutality towards detained children, who, among other measures, were said to be beaten and deprived of food. Had Saudi Arabia taken steps to deal with the problem in the light of article 37 of the Convention?

38. The Committee had received some information on the status of international NGOs in Saudi Arabia, but it would appreciate knowing whether the Government was planning to establish a more frank and constructive dialogue with them in the future on the problem of human rights.

39. Ms. KARP said she welcomed the fact that Saudi Arabia was considering ratifying other human rights conventions, because it was not possible to implement the rights of the child in a

culture that did not respect the rights of adults. It was particularly important that it should ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), since it was inconceivable that a girl child should have full rights but that they would cease when she came of age. The basic purpose of all human rights conventions was to ensure respect for human dignity, which she presumed was also a basic principle of shariah and the Koran.

40. The approach to the implementation of the Convention taken by Saudi Arabia would appear to ensure the welfare of children, but not the right to develop their own personality and participate in affairs that concerned them. How were children taught the relevant "life skills" in school, concerning reproductive health, for example, and what other counselling methods were used to help them lead a more responsible life and understand the interaction between the family and the outside world?

41. It would be interesting to know whether the council of senior Islamic scholars helped to develop the implementation of the Convention and find the right balance between shariah and the Convention when they appeared to be in conflict.

42. With regard to the juvenile justice system, it was unclear whether the prohibition of the death penalty referred to children who were under 18 years of age, or to those who had committed the respective offence when they were under 18 years of age.

43. It would also be interesting to learn how girl victims of sexual abuse were helped to lodge complaints and give evidence about the experience and how they were rehabilitated, in the light of certain attitudes that were opposed to the best interest of girl victims of such offences.

44. Ms. Mokhuane took the Chair.

45. Ms. EL GUINDI observed that the State provided secondary education to all girls free of charge, but, according to the written replies on enrolment in secondary schools, each year fewer girls chose to pursue their schooling at that level. It was unclear whether that was due to cultural reasons or to family pressures and it would be useful to know whether any studies had been conducted to monitor the decrease and its impact on development.

46. Mr. DOEK inquired about the status of children born out of wedlock. Paragraph 91 of the report stated that every male Saudi citizen had to apply to obtain an identity card; he asked whether girls did not need such a card and, if not, why not.

47. Although 10 years had elapsed since the Gulf War, there was still a camp housing about 5,000 Iraqi and Afghanistan refugees in Saudi Arabia. It was reported that they were well taken care of and that children were educated at the primary and secondary level, but were unable to continue on to university because they could not leave the camp. However, children had the right to education beyond the age of 15 or 16 years of age. It would be useful to learn the rationale behind the limitations imposed on such children and whether any consideration was being given to changing the situation.

48. Ms. SARDENBERG said that in November 1999, the Deputy Minister of the Interior had announced that measures were under way to issue identity cards to Saudi women; as nothing more had been heard since then, further information would be appreciated.

The meeting was suspended at 4.14 p.m. and resumed at 4.30 p.m.

49. Mr. ATTAR (Saudi Arabia) said that from the number and diversity of the questions it was evident that the Committee had studied the report carefully, and its comments would be very helpful when Saudi Arabia prepared future reports.

50. Dr. BAYARI (Saudi Arabia) said that breastfeeding was encouraged in Saudi Arabia and hospitals and health centres provided support and information to mothers. As to why Saudi Arabia officially recommended breastfeeding until four months of age, rather than six months, there had been considerable debate on the issue by international experts. As children started to receive complementary feeding as of two months, breastfeeding did not have to be the sole source of food from four to six months. In practice, breastfeeding continued up until two years at times. The continued development of healthy children was carefully monitored by the doctor.

51. A section of the labour law set maternity leave at two months, in principle; however, it could be extended to four months or even up to one year at the doctor's discretion. Family planning was enshrined in Islam; it was a right of parents to take the decision on the desired number of children together and all the known scientific methods of contraception were used.

52. Abortion was prohibited unless medical reasons existed such as the illness of the mother or foetal suffering, when the decision was taken with the whole family. Pregnancies outside wedlock were carried to term and a decision was taken on whether the family would keep the child or place it in an institution. Most families accepted to keep the child, who had the same right to name and nationality as children born in wedlock.

53. The statistics regarding disabled children were indeed somewhat puzzling. The discrepancy between the numbers of disabled boys and girls admitted to regular schools might have resulted from the fact that the Government had initially begun to integrate disabled children into boys' schools only, and had only recently extended the policy to girls' schools. Parents of disabled children were generally apprehensive about how their children would fare in regular schools, and that was particularly the case for parents of girls, who tended to be even more protective. The higher number of disabled boys might also be due to the fact that boys were more accident-prone that girls. Lastly, the statistical coverage might have been partial.

54. Mr. DHUBAIBAN (Saudi Arabia) said that girls had the right to take part in sports and social activities. Married female students were able to continue their education, either at secondary school or university. There was no discrimination whatsoever between males and females in education. However, education was made available through a number of bodies, including the Ministry of Education, the General Presidency of Girls' Education, the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training and the Ministry of Higher Education. The information in the report on vocational education did not include girls because it had been taken from the General Organization for Technical Education and Vocational Training,

which offered courses for boys only. However, various centres for vocational training of girls were run by other bodies. In 1998 some 60,000 girls and women had been enrolled in 19 colleges, where bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees could be obtained. The country's eight universities all had women's sections. Women could thus pursue their studies in any specialization, and were not restricted to nursing or education. Admission to university was based solely on final secondary school examinations and standardized admissions tests.

55. Corporal punishment was prohibited, and any teacher who administered it would be subject to disciplinary action. Reproductive health was taught as an ordinary subject. Many of the curricula in Saudi Arabia had been drawn up by experts from the American University in Beirut. The curricula were modern, and had been updated regularly, with the participation of teachers, experts and students. Students were invited by decision-makers to express their views concerning much of the education policy, and more often than not such views were taken on board.

56. Mr. AL-SHAMEKH (Saudi Arabia) said that under the regulations concerning juveniles, young offenders were handed over immediately by the police to the juvenile supervision authorities. Both senior officers and policemen were well trained in such procedures and were aware of that policy. In practice, children did not remain with the police even for a single hour. Juvenile offenders under 15 were first sent for a medical examination. The authorities then studied the child's family status and tried to ascertain the reason for the delinquency, which was then communicated to the judge. By law, juveniles could be questioned only at social welfare, guidance and surveillance centres, and in a calm manner and environment. Parents were entitled to attend such procedures.

57. Juveniles could not be executed. Police brutality was not generally a problem, but when isolated cases came to light procedures for redress existed. Policemen who disregarded the regulations on the handling of juveniles risked dismissal from their posts.

58. The main reason people lost Saudi citizenship was that they obtained other nationalities, as Saudi Arabia did not recognize dual citizenship. Other reasons for deprivation of Saudi nationality included military service in an enemy army and treason. Children of persons deprived of Saudi nationality were not affected, and were protected from discrimination, as the Koran included a passage which stated that no person should be judged for the acts of others. The procedures for obtaining an identity card were currently being revised, and girls would soon be able to obtain such cards.

59. Mr. AL-NASSER (Saudi Arabia) said that because Saudi inheritance law was taken directly from the Koran, it was considered to be the word of God, hence there was no room for interpretation or the adoption of another system. The inheritance system took into consideration the basic needs of both men and women. In some cases, a woman's entitlement could be much greater than that of a man, for example if she had no one to care for her. If a woman's husband, brother or father neglected her material needs, she was entitled to take the case to court to defend her interests. The same applied to orphans, who could sue their guardians or relatives. Divorced women, especially those who were breastfeeding, were entitled to certain privileges in respect of inheritance. Divorced men were obliged to pay alimony and child support for their families.

60. At the age of seven, children of divorced parents could express their opinion as to whether they preferred to remain in the custody of their mothers or fathers. An award of custody did not sever ties with the other parent.

61. Mr. AL-HARBI (Saudi Arabia) said that divorced women were also entitled to social welfare benefits, and that charitable institutions provided them with monetary and in-kind support.

62. When it was found that parents were unfit to provide care for their children, the Government first attempted to place the children with other family members. In each case a study was carried out to determine whether any events or family history would preclude such a solution. For children who could not be placed with their relatives, new homes were found through the system of kafalah, or the children were placed in social welfare institutions. While very few children worked, some sought employment during the summer vacation in order to obtain work experience. In any case, all child labour was voluntary and was remunerated. The labour inspection authorities effectively monitored compliance with child labour laws. The ILO Conventions regulating child labour would soon be fully implemented.

63. Children born to women in detention stayed with their mothers in prison. The same procedures applied to both boys and girls when children were separated from their parents. If a girl was removed from her family and the family situation did not improve sufficiently for her to return, she would stay at a social centre for girls, where social, psychological and health services were available. When such girls reached the age of 20 they had the right to leave the social centre if they wished. Children born out of wedlock were brought up in foster families under the system of kafalah; if no such solution was available they were raised in social welfare institutions.

64. Delinquent children in institutions were cared for by full teams of psychologists, social workers and medical staff, who assisted in their rehabilitation. By law, the State had to follow up cases of delinquents after rehabilitation.

65. Mr. AL-RASSI (Saudi Arabia) said that the Government maintained an ongoing dialogue with NGOs engaged in human rights activities. It had, however, encountered some difficulties in dealing with certain organizations which refused to accept the State party invoking Islamic law in discussing human rights. Several workshops and seminars had been convened with the participation of NGOs, in cooperation for example with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

66. The Government had worked in coordination with the Government of Bangladesh to repatriate and reunite with their families the Bangladeshi children who had been staying in Saudi Arabia illegally and begging following their pilgrimage to Mecca.

67. Some 33,000 Iraqi refugees had come to Saudi Arabia. When they had first arrived, the Government had coordinated its work for them with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had commended the State party's efforts. Since then, the Government had worked closely with other States and with UNHCR to find them

host countries or to repatriate them. Some had refused to return to Iraq, and there were currently about 3,000 or 4,000 remaining in the camp. Two Saudi universities had set up programmes to enable them to continue their education.

68. Mr. AL-MADEY (Saudi Arabia) said that the Commission on Human Rights had at its fifty-fifth session commended Saudi Arabia for the protection and attention that it had provided for Iraqi refugees. The Government had spent some $2 billion on their care. More than 90 per cent of the refugees were military officers who had come to Saudi Arabia after the liberation of Kuwait. Their confinement to the camp was intended to provide them with protection. As Iraq had been the aggressor, it was very difficult to integrate such refugees into Saudi society.

69. Mr. AL-SHAMEKH (Saudi Arabia) said that a public awareness campaign was being carried out in the mass media and in schools with a view to protecting juveniles from the risk of car accidents. Replying to a question by Mr. Doek, he said that a juvenile could not be detained by police for the theft of money from a shop unless there was a complaint from the owner. Provided the thief returned the money, he would be exempt from punishment. If he did not do so, he could be detained at the order of a judge, and was entitled to a defence lawyer at every stage of proceedings. He could also be assisted in court by his parents.

70. Mr. BAYARI (Saudi Arabia) said that reports of trafficking in children in Saudi Arabia were unfounded. Foreign children who came into the country to beg were treated with the same respect as Saudi Arabian citizens. They were provided with assistance by the Social Welfare Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, as well as medical treatment within the framework of the Ministry of Health, and some were subsequently repatriated.

71. Replying to questions concerning sexual discrimination, he said that girls and boys had equal rights at school, just as women had the same cultural and labour opportunities as men. While it was well known that certain professions were more suited to men than women, many women became specialists in engineering or other traditionally male-dominated fields. Young people of both sexes were encouraged to develop their individual strengths to the full.

72. Islamic law did not specifically prohibit any of the traditions and customs of Saudi Arabian society. However, if practices were found to be inconsistent with the spirit of the law, specialists were appointed to advise those concerned on how to lead an appropriate lifestyle. For example, traditional healers had been warned of the dangers of using skin-burning techniques. Public awareness campaigns, involving specialists from all the relevant fields, were also carried out with a view to discouraging harmful practices.

73. Mr. DOEK said that he would appreciate more information concerning the study on procedures to protect children from physical abuse, referred to in the written replies.

74. He welcomed the decision to make two universities available for Iraqi refugees who wanted to pursue their studies, and said that it had never been the intention of the Committee to question the quality of services provided for refugees. Could the delegation clarify whether the death sentence could be imposed on a child who had committed a crime before the age of 18 but had reached majority by the time he appeared in court?

75. Ms. KARP asked whether children had the right to appeal against a court judgement and receive assistance in such cases. She welcomed the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools and the fact that a study was being carried out concerning children suffering from physical abuse. Nevertheless, it would be useful to learn whether any assessment of corporal punishment had been made prior to that study, and whether any steps were being taken to persuade parents of the value of alternative methods of correction.

76. Ms. SARDENBERG said that further details on the Committee on Deliberate Child Abuse would be useful, including whether it took part in the study on protection procedures. Regarding children's health, were there many cases of obesity and anaemia, and, if so, what was the Government doing to prevent them? Lastly, she asked whether the Social Guidance Unit was designed to convert people of non-Islamic faiths.

77. Mr. RABAH, referring to the social surveillance centres of the juvenile justice system, asked whether a child who reached the age of 18 before the completion of his sentence would be transferred to an adult prison, or whether separate disciplinary institutions existed to prevent young prisoners mixing with adults.

78. Mr. AL-DABYAN (Saudi Arabia) said that a comprehensive five-year plan had been devised for Saudi Arabia in the light of the recommendations of the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights, and that the National Commission for Child Welfare was responsible for implementing it on all issues concerning children. Although a specific plan of action for children did not currently exist, a study was being conducted with a view to developing one. In the meantime, the National Commission would continue to base its activities on the overall plan.

79. Mr. AL-HARBI (Saudi Arabia) said that the Social Guidance Unit was not intended for the conversion of people of non-Islamic faiths. It simply provided a telephone advice service for people with personal problems or complaints.

80. The Committee on Deliberate Child Abuse received and dealt with complaints from children, and worked closely with hospitals and the police.

81. Juveniles serving sentences in social surveillance centres were not transferred to adult institutions until they reached the age of 20. All children were entitled to legal counsel as well as the right to appeal.

82. Mr. AL-DHUBAIBAN (Saudi Arabia) said that he did not have sufficient information to comment on the extent of the use of corporal punishment within families, but he could confirm that it was prohibited in all schools.

83. Mr. BAYARI (Saudi Arabia) said that a study into the trafficking of children had not been carried out because the problem did not currently exist in Saudi Arabia. It was prohibited to use the death sentence for juveniles. If, however, the accused had reached the age of majority by the time of the trial, the judge was responsible for deciding to what extent criminal responsibility should be applied.

84. There were specialized clinics for addressing the nutritional health concerns of mothers and children, and virtually no cases of anaemic children existed. All health personnel were trained in the provisions of the Convention.

85. Ms. EL GUINDI, presenting her preliminary concluding observations, said that Saudi Arabia was undoubtedly a pioneer for the Arab countries and that it actively sought to prevent human rights abuses that occurred as a result of traditional practices. She welcomed the steps the Government had taken to disseminate the Convention. Nevertheless, the Committee would appreciate greater support for the mechanisms set up to implement the Convention, particularly in the areas of establishing priorities, monitoring information and assessing available resources.

86. She said that more efforts would be appreciated to increase the participation of NGOs in activities designed to eliminate discriminatory attitudes towards women and children.

87. It was important to stress the need for revision of national legislation in order to clarify Islamic law in the area of children's rights. That included procedures concerning civil rights, the registration of births, the establishment of legal minimum ages for marriage and employment and the rights of disabled children and working mothers. She expressed satisfaction with Saudi Arabia's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Discrimination against women existed in many parts of the world, including Saudi Arabia, and it was useful to decide on which traditional practices most needed to be changed in order to eliminate it.

88. Regarding the role of the family, she said that fathers shared equal responsibility with mothers for the upbringing of children. Greater attention should be paid to the family environment, particularly with regard to the rights of women and children in cases of divorce. The education of girls should be encouraged at all levels, and study programmes should be redesigned in order to enhance the image of women in society.

89. Mr. ATTAR (Saudi Arabia) said that there was an important distinction between Islamic law and traditional customs. While the Government tried to raise public awareness with a view to eliminating harmful practices, the importance of traditions could not be completely ignored. He welcomed the Committee's acknowledgement of his Government's efforts to ratify international agreements and to fulfil its commitments.

90. The CHAIRPERSON said that Saudi Arabia's political will had been demonstrated by its ratification of the Convention. While the Committee had not always been in agreement with aspects of Saudi Arabia's interpretation of the Convention, she expressed appreciation for the delegation's cooperative approach.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.